

Walking Tours

While the names of the tours may seem familiar, this second edition offers all new Mysteries and Curiosities that abound in your backyard arroyo. We have also added a new tour, the Spacecraft Development tour, that takes you to some of the different buildings on Lab that are instrumental in the development and construction of a mission.

Although these Curiosities are listed in recommended walking order, feel free to mix and match along the way. And as you walk, remember the Lab Director's favorite Emerson quote, "Do not go where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path, and leave a trail."

Signs of Life

"They may not wear lab coats or design spacecraft, but the wildlife that shares JPL's 377-acre campus is also part of its culture along with the human inhabitants. The Lab was built from the arroyo, or dry creek, up into the side of the San Gabriel Mountains. Lab employees learn quickly that they are simply allowed the courtesy of sharing the land." —JPL 101

DIURNALS

Mule Deer ①
Bobcat
Ring-tailed Cat
Tree Squirrel
Ground Squirrel

REPTILES

Garter Snake
Gopher Snake
King Snake
Rattlesnake
Western Fence Lizard ②

INSECTS

Black Widow
Tortoise Beetle
Praying Mantis ③
Dragonfly ④

PLANTS

Poison Sumac
California Sage Brush ⑤
Golden Currant

NOCTURNALS

Coyote
Opossum
Cray Fox
Mountain Lion

BIRDS

Red-tailed Hawk
Great Horned Owl ⑥
Blue Jay
Peregrine Falcon
Least Bell's Vireo
Coastal California Gnatcatcher

TREES

Australian Fire Wheel ⑦
Olive Tree
Citronella Lemon-Scented Eucalyptus ⑧
Coral Tree
Brazilian Pepper Tree
Dawn Redwood Tree
Silk-Floss Tree ⑨
Manzanita

↑ space

JPL
Jet Propulsion Laboratory
California Institute of Technology

POINTS of INTEREST

GREAT ESCAPES

Take your lunch to one of these locations or refresh, revive, and renew during a break.
Duration: 10-15 minutes Distance/Level: 33 miles / Easy

Forgotten Cafeteria
Who forgot it; I forgot. What's on the menu; I don't remember. Where is it; better check the map.
Building 190

Out There
In the spirit of Voyager 1, leave the gravitational pull of 301 and enjoy a break or meal on this succulent patio.
Building 301, across from Conference Room 169

321 Patio
Countdown to relaxation, scenic views, and free oxygen.
Building 321, 6th Floor (near Conference Room 617)

OUTER RINGS

For those Mysteries and Curiosities that are literally off the map.
Duration: N/A Distance/Level: N/A

Softball Field
It's not possible to strike out in the C League, either at bat or with team names like the L.A. Radars and the Electric Eccentrics.
C League at Hahamongna Park (pictured), B League at Loma Alta Park in Altadena

Space Sign
Artist Richard Ankrum would be proud.
Located above the deer crossing sign, outside the entrance to the Lab.

Devil's Gate Trail
However, if you want to sleep through the night, do not google JPL Devil's Gate.
Trailhead located above the (old) east parking lot.

SPACECRAFT DEVELOPMENT

Below you'll see the steps in the development and construction of a spacecraft. While each mission is unique and has different requirements, most spacecraft will pass through these buildings.
Duration: 25-35 minutes Distance/Level: 1.22 miles / Hard

1. CONCEPTUAL DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

Building 301: Left Field
Where most ideas come from... Left Field. See the unending whiteboard space, sticky notes, toys, and trinkets that fuel inspiration. A place where no idea is a bad idea.
Building 301, across from Conference Room 169

2. PROPOSAL PHASE

Building 301: Team X
After a concept is approved, it moves into Building 301 as the team prepares an official proposal. A great place to see this process in action is in Team X.
Building 301, 168

3. PROPOSAL APPROVED

Building 321
It often takes 2-4 years for a project to be authorized. However, once NASA authorizes a project it moves into Building 321 where the project offices are located during its development process. 3-2-1, Liftoff!

4. TESTING

Building 302: Electronics (Microdevices)
Where the guts of the electronics and instruments are tested and developed.

317

Building 317: Guidance and Control
Testing in this building includes mechanical, thermal, telecom as well as navigation and control.

125

Building 125: Plumbing and Water Tests
Simulates decent stage propulsion with water.

Building 150: Environmental Testing II
Thermal vacuum testing takes place in the 25-foot space simulator, which is also on the National Register of Historic Places.

144

Building 144: Environmental Test I
Here you will find the shaker tables and acoustics for dynamics testing.

5. SPACECRAFT ASSEMBLY

Building 179
Here is where it all comes together: post-environmental testing, puro and systems testing, as well as computer in-pit and out-pits are tested and assembled.

6. LAUNCH

Building 264
As the project moves towards launch, the team will move from 321 to 264. Most of the flight operations happen in 264 but some projects, like MSL, are in 230.

UNCLASSIFIED

These interesting locales didn't fit in anywhere, so we gave them a category all their own.
Duration: 15-20 minutes Distance/Level: 75 miles / Medium

The Eternal Holiday Tree
All holidays, all year round, viewed through a holiday-colored lens.
Building 111, B26A

Floor 2 1/2
Malkovich, Malkovich, Malkovich.
Building 300, Between the 2nd and 3rd Floor (main stairs)

Door to Nowhere
Work place for John Lennon's Nowhere Man.
Building 157, 206

The Wrigley Field Bus Stop
Covered in ivy with only its schedule and sign peeking through the leaves, this jewel of a bus stop distinguishes itself from others.
Next to Building 291

Disclaimer: Many of the Mysteries and Curiosities are in buildings that may require an escort or a background check to enter. These include Buildings 144, 150, 230, 264, 301, and 321. Please visit these Curiosities with a person who has proper access if entering the building. Plus, these tours are scientifically proven to be more fun when done with a colleague.

ART WALK

Explore the Lab's creative side by taking a visual field trip.
Duration: 15-20 minutes Distance/Level: 42 miles / Medium

Polymath Passage
Invocative of de Vinci, this polymath passage draws its ichnographic inspiration from parallels between the human form and technological innovations.
Building 264, 4th Floor (pay attention to the elevator door on the right)

The Critical Eye
Neil Degrasse Tyson is to James Cameron's star field in Titanic as an anonymous JPLer (who left a post-it note correction for the artist) is to the root line of the equation in this painting. The artist acquiesced and extended the line, thereby validating the equation.
Building 301, 1st Floor (the painting near the elevators)

Readymade
Scattered throughout the Lab one can find all sorts of "Readymade" sculptures. Where is your favorite "sculpture" located?
Beside Trailer 1712, next to the yellow ladder along the concrete wall (or wherever your imagination takes you)

TIME TRAVEL

Adventure to distant places without leaving JPL.
Duration: 15-20 minutes Distance/Level: 46 miles/Easy

Wall of Directors
Like a stroll in Cooperstown, OH or the Bernabéu Tour in Madrid, JPL honors its extraordinary.
Building 180, 1st Floor Conference Room

The Vault
A treasure trove of history and information.
Building 111, Rooms B25A, B, and C

Timeline of Firsts
From Greek philosophers, 6th grade history teachers, and a superhero's uncle, everyone agrees that to know the future one must know the past.
Building 321, 6th Floor (head towards Room 628)

Telephone Booth
Imagine the last time you stepped into a telephone booth. Poof! You've traveled back in time.
Building 170

SAFETY EXERCISES

There's plenty of safety and plenty of exercise on this tour.
Duration: 10-15 minutes Distance/Level: 35 miles / Hard going up. Easy coming down.

Wile E. Coyote's Workshop
An unusual amount of safety signs, all in one place.
Outside Building 308

Mountain Goat Stairs
If Rocky trained here he wouldn't have lost to Apollo Creed in Rocky I.
Behind Building 313

SPACES OF WONDER

Odd space-themed locales, even by JPL standards.
Duration: 25-35 minutes Distance/Level: 1.2 miles / Hard

Planetary Protection
All of the Planets. All of the Time! JPL's Planetary Protection group conducts their research and develops flight project implementation strategies in facilities at this location. The Space Microbiology Lab hosts the Planetary Protection Archive housing ~3,500 microbial isolates dating back to the Viking era.
Building 98

Ion Lab
Marked by its retro JPL logo, the Electric Propulsion Lab contains a large vacuum tank used to test ion engines. When turned on, these engines produce a trail of blue xenon ions that glow like a light saber.
Building 148

Loan Pool
Unlike your neighbor's tools, these must be returned. The Loan Pool "recommends and provides general purpose and test equipment for Lab wide use."
Building 125, B10

Trophy Case
Plenty of hardware in this case to make even the most successful sports franchise envious. Awards include two collar trophies, Jackson and Smithsonian awards as well as many others, both big and small. The awards themselves are objects of beauty and tell an interesting history of the Lab and its accomplishments.
Building 321 (lobby)

OPS Lab
Mars in a Holodeck? Mission control in a browser? Spacecraft that think? Not science fiction here! Developers and designers gather in this collaborative space to push the boundaries of mission operations.
Building 321, 301-232, 262, 264

Coolest spot in the Universe
Stop by and say "Hi" to the team that is creating an atomic refrigerator, which will also be the coolest spot in the known Universe when it is sent to the International Space Station in 2016.
Building 298, 110A

PARKING SPACE

JPLer's proclivity for all things SPACE even extends to where we park our cars. It is believed that this lot has the highest density of science-themed novelty license plates on the planet.
Building 349